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TWO INFLUENZA CASES CONFIRMED IN MILWAUKEE

The City of Milwaukee Health Department has confirmed its first 2 cases of Influenza type A for the 2003-2004 flu season. A total of 7 laboratory - confirmed cases of Influenza type A have been reported in Wisconsin. Those other cases have occurred in Kenosha, Madison, Racine and Appleton.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United States is experiencing an earlier onset of the flu season than usual, and the viruses that are circulating have been associated with more cases of serious illness than influenza viruses seen during the previous 3 years. Although a few states such as Texas and Colorado are experiencing increased levels of flu activity, Wisconsin is experiencing only sporadic cases at this time. Influenza activity in Wisconsin will certainly increase, however, in the weeks ahead.

Signs and symptoms of the flu include: a sudden onset of fever of up to 104 degrees, sweating, chills and severe muscle aches. Flu symptoms can also include dry cough, nasal congestion, sore throat, headache and fatigue. Persons severely ill or with illness that does not readily resolve should contact their health care provider or seek medical care.

The best protection from influenza is the flu vaccine. *Flu vaccine not only prevents serious illness, but also prevents transmission of flu to others.* Anyone who wants to decrease their chance of getting flu or its complications should get vaccinated. Vaccine is especially important for health care workers and those people at high risk of complications from influenza infection, including:

- anyone over the age of 50
- infants 6-23 months old
- women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the influenza season (October – April)
- residents of nursing homes or other chronic care facilities
- persons with heart, lung or kidney problems, diabetes, sickle cell disease, other chronic diseases, or weakened immune systems for any reason (cancer, chemotherapy, HIV, etc.)
- household members of anyone in the above categories

The CDC has reported that the most common flu strain seen so far this year is slightly different than the strains covered in this year's vaccine. The vaccine is still effective in reducing illness associated with influenza, and since influenza is both earlier and potentially more severe this year than it has been in the past, vaccination is even more important than ever.

There is no shortage of influenza vaccine this year. Individuals interested in obtaining a vaccination should contact their primary care physician or medical provider for an appointment. Individuals of any age who do not have a primary care physician or are uninsured are encouraged to contact the City of Milwaukee Health Department's Flu Hotline at (414) 286-3616, Monday-Friday 8:15 AM-4:30 PM for information about where to get flu vaccinations.

Free flu vaccinations will be available for children age 6 months to 18 years at City of Milwaukee Health Department Health Centers. Flu vaccination clinic schedules and locations and other general information about flu such as FAQs and regular flu-related updates are also available on the Health Department's Flu Webpage, www.milwaukee.gov/health/resp.